# CHANDRAHASA



GRADE IV

(ADAPTED FROM THE KANARESE JAIMINI BHARATHA)

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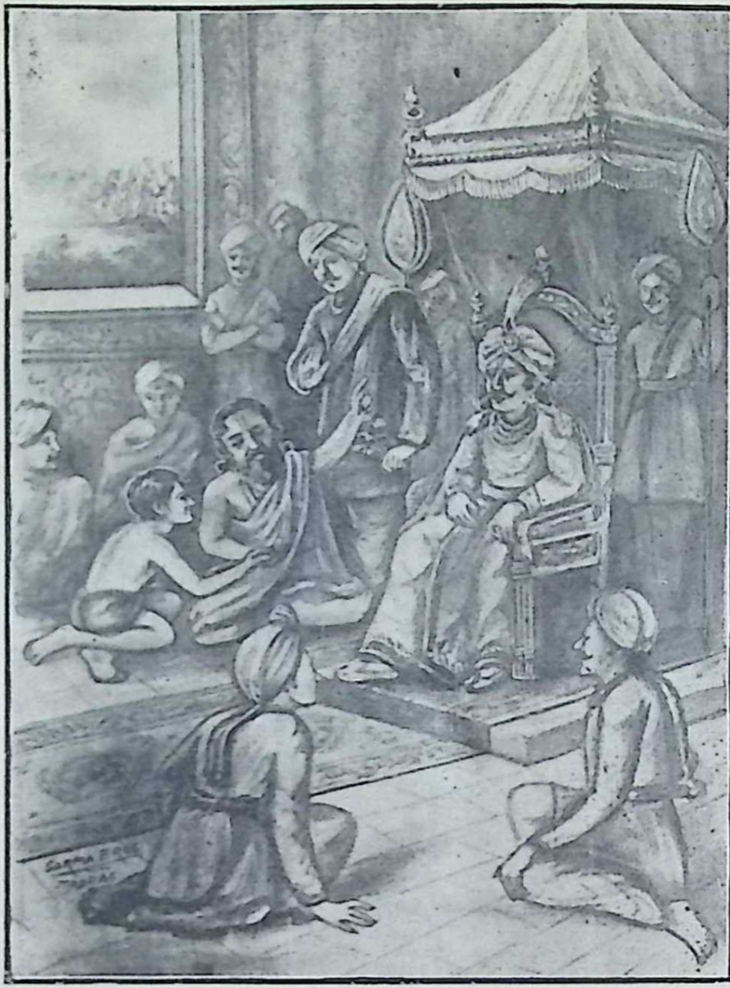
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# PREFACE

THIS story is from the Kanarese **Jaimini Bharatha** with a few alterations. My grateful thanks are due to Prof. J. C. Rollo, M. A. of Mysore University for kindly looking over the Ms. and offering valuable criticisms. Suggestions for further improvement will be gratefully received.

THE AUTHOR

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—*Page 15*

# CHANDRAHASA

## CHAPTER I

### THE LAND OF KERALA

INDIA is not a small country like England or France, but can more truly be called a continent. Vast are her shores and numerous the tongues her people speak. Many races inhabit her and many religions flourish on her soil. Her earth treasures in its bosom countless minerals for her children to work, and her soil yields crops of countless variety.

Many are her beauty-spots; the best known of them are the State of Kashmir in the north with its beautiful valley and crystal lake, and the enchanting land of Kerala in the south.

The latter comprises the British districts of Malabar and Coorg and the States of Travancore and Cochin. The Western Ghats run across it. Forests clothe the mountain sides and streams water the low-

lands. The waters of the Arabian Sea run into the land for many miles forming beautiful backwaters; and the scenery on either side has few parallels in the world. So rich and rare is its produce that it has been called "The Garden of India."

The people of Kerala are proud of their land. Not only has Nature endowed it with all conveniences and comforts of their daily life, but also it has a history reaching back to periods so remote as to be called legendary. The land was blessed, the people say, by the holy feet of Parasurama, who raised it from under the deep waters. Here it was that Vishnu, in the guise of a Brahmin mendicant, begged Bali for three steps of land. Here did divine kings rule for long, guiding erring mankind.

Later on, earthly rulers took the place of the divine kings. Many heroes arose who wrought such deeds of valour that the name "Kerala" stood for all that was great in manly prowess.

Kerala was not only the nurse of warriors, but also the land of scholars and priests. Sages delighted to roam in its forests; many holy hermitages grew up in their shady bowers and spread divine

knowledge. No wonder that such a land gave birth to the great and holy Sri Sankara.

The children of Kerala see in the great past of their land the promise of a splendid future. So they love their land passionately and almost every one of their songs begins thus :--

In the famous Jambudwipa[1]
There are many splendid kingdoms:
But as high above all mountains,
Thrones the snowy Mahameru[2]
And as in the flowering forest,
Blooms the champaca the sweetest,
So is Kerala, a pearl-string,
Loveliest among the kingdoms.
Live in it, my friend, and prosper![3]

## CHAPTER II

### THE PRINCE OF KOLA

ABOUT two thousand years ago, the Chera land[4] was divided into a number of kingdoms. Each kingdom was separate in itself; each king ruled his own

1 One of the Sanskrit names for 'India.'

2 The mountain abode of the Gods.

3 Adapted from M. J. Walhouse's verse in "Sceney of an Indian Stream."

4 Another name for 'Kerala.'

land, controlling its own wealth, and commanding its own army.

The kingdoms did not always live peacefully with one another. The more greedy among the kings attacked and killed their weaker neighbours and thus extended their own sway. Thus kings rose and fell. Might was right; and the brute rule,

> "They should take who have the power
> And they should keep who can"

held sway over them.

Kola was one of the minor kingdoms in the country. At the time our story begins, its ruler was a young man famous for his piety and goodness. His queen had all the womanly virtues and moved with her subjects as one of them. They were a happy couple. In course of time the queen bore the young king a lovely boy. Learned priests cast the child's horoscope; and the wisest among them predicted that he would rule one day the entire Chera land. Mula was his star and his right foot bore an additional toe. His parents were filled with gladness and the whole land rejoiced.

The joy was but shortlived. Hardly was the boy three months old, when a neighbouring chief attacked the king. The latter with his faithful men fought bravely,

but in vain. The king fell in the battle. His widowed queen, as was the custom then, gave up her life on the funeral pyre. The child was thus left an orphan in the world.

There was one good soul in the dead king's palace, the child's nurse, whose heart broke in anguish at the fate of the infant prince. Her experience of the world told her that the child would not be safe in the palace; the new ruler would have him killed as he might prove a future rival.

So, on the day of the king's death, at dead of night she took the child out secretly and hurried to the neighbouring land of Kuntala. There the royal nurse passed as a beggar woman ; and none suspected that the child she held in her arms had royal blood in his veins.

The child was fed and clothed from alms. Often would the nurse with the child on her lap shed tears at the change of fortune. Sometimes the plainness of his garments would send a thrill through her body when she saw around her the rich adornments of baser born children. She would deny herself food for days together, and with the savings of her beggary buy her ward a few trinkets or some cheap

toys. She watched his lisping with a mother's pride, and nothing delighted her so much as his innocent pranks.

Thus three years passed. At the end of this period the faithful nurse, grown old with age and care, passed into eternal rest. The child was alone, helpless and homeless.

## CHAPTER III

### TOSSED ABOUT BY FORTUNE

THERE were no poor-houses or orphanages in those days. There was no need for them, for every rich man's house served the purpose admirably. No beggar was ever turned away; and, what is more, the bashful mendicant was often pressed to dine in the company of the head of the family and the children of the house. So our homeless boy found many homes welcoming him.

Many a gentle lady of Kuntala felt pity for the boy and took him to her home. They petted him and feasted their eyes upon his childish pranks. Many dainties they offered him. The childless dames of the place vied with one another in adorning him with the gayest flowers. Many

lovely hands attended to his toilet. Their embraces lulled him to sleep at night.

The men too felt for the boy. Though he was hardly four years old, they admitted him into a Patasala.[1] A venerable guru presided over it; and when he saw the boy, he was much struck with his beauty and the intelligence of his face. He taught him to recite the many names of Vishnu. From his lips, the orphan heard the stories of oppressed Prahlada and little Dhruva and the deeds of Sri Krishna the divine cow-herd of Brindavan.

Thus were his days spent. Neither he nor his patrons knew anything about his parentage. He passed everywhere as a homeless but bright youth. He bore no name save that which the kind dames of Kuntala had given him, "the beautiful six-toed child."

## CHAPTER IV

### KUNTALA

KUNTALA was a mighty empire. Many chieftains accepted its king as their over-lord. Tributes flowed into the royal treasury from far and near.

1 School.

The king was a just ruler. He was learned in all arts and sciences; besides, he was deeply religious. He was blessed with an only child, a daughter.

He had many ministers. The chief among them was Dushtabuddhi, an alert and able man. But his heart was true to his name. He never cared for the good of the people; he was utterly selfish, and in all he did first sought his own riches and glory.

He was cunning in the extreme. He so pleased the king by sweet words that the latter took him for an upright and honest adviser. He pretended to be so good that he quickly rose in the king's favour. The king was too pure-minded to feel that

All that glitters is not gold,
Gilded tombs do worms infold.

The king grew old, and he felt his failing health an obstacle to good rule. So he looked about for a man who would, as his deputy, rule the land justly. None seemed to him so well suited for the place as the chief minister. The latter became king of Kuntala except in name.

No ambitious man is ever satisfied with his power; he thirsts for more. Dushtabuddhi was no exception to this. So it is no wonder that he aimed at royalty itself.

The path to it seemed to him easy. Fortune seemed to favour him. For the crafty minister had a son, Madana by name. He was a clever and comely lad. He was so simple and good-natured that people wondered how so good a son could be born to so cunning a man. Dushtabuddhi wanted to unite him in wedlock with Champaka, the king's only daughter. He felt sure that, if this was done, his son would inherit the kingdom.

Those were the days when men and women chose their own partners. Parents, no doubt, helped the choice and advised their children; but they never forced them to an unwilling union. Dushtabuddhi set about to effect this marriage, by bringing the two young people—as yet not even in their teens—together as often as possible. "Both are beautiful. Both seem clever and intelligent. Surely each will come to have a liking for the other. As they grow up, this mutual liking will transform itself into an intense desire to be life-partners. The king will not say nay to his daughter's wish. Then my life's ambition will be fulfilled and I can close my eyes as the father of the realm's king." So thought Dushtabuddhi, and worked towards his wish.

Madana and Champaka played and studied together and with them Vishaya, the minister's daughter. Thus the three children spent their time in innocent games and pleasant study.

## CHAPTER V

### DESTINY FORETOLD

ROYAL feasts and festivals were the order of the day when Dushtabuddhi reigned in Kuntala; and none—not even the poorest—lacked food and entertainment in those public celebrations. It was whispered about that the chief minister indulged in these shows to screen his wicked rule and make other nations believe that Kuntala was a happy land. None had the courage to speak out. Many were the stories that passed the people's lips of the cruelty and injustice meted out to plain-spoken men. It was also well-known that loyal officers were replaced by his personal followers.

The celebrations usually concluded with prayers for the prosperity of the realm and blessings on the ruler and his officers, uttered by the assembled priests. On one such occasion, the royal priests seated near

the prime-minister observed a group of boys standing round the festive hall and playing their youthful pranks. One among the company—a boy hardly four years old, wearing a simple loin-cloth and with a charming face and most winning looks—attracted their attention. They took him for a noble's son who had lost his parents. They asked him who he was; but he could not answer, for this was none other than the "six-toed orphan boy."

The most learned among the priests—a man well-known for his foretelling powers—began to scan the boy's face and palms. Gradually the smile faded from his face. He sat for long in a brown study, turning the boy's hand this way and that. Often he turned to look at the minister's face and at last, addressing the minister, he spoke in slow and measured tones:

"My lord, may the Gods bless this land and its righteous ruler! May you live long as our Emperor's Deputy!

"This child—so the lines on his palm show—is born to the purple. The course of the lines predicts that ere long he shall be the master of Kuntala; nay, not of Kuntala alone, but of all this Kerala land.

"My lore further reveals to me that he

and you will be bound together by bonds of love and that in time you will own him as your saviour and master."

Dushtabuddhi's face changed colour.

Perceiving this, but appearing not to have done so, the seer continued:

"But, alas! many sad lines cross his path! God grant him long life! The fates seem to be against him. Who can override destiny?"

Dushtabuddhi's face wore a sinister smile. Addressing the priest he said, "It is well that you have read into the future of this vagrant boy. No more shall he be allowed to go a-begging for food from door to door. If your words are true—I have never known them to fail— he must be brought up like a king. He shall stay with us and bear my children company."

"Nobly spoken!" uttered in one voice the assembled priests. Loaded with presents, they departed from the palace.

The minister immediately commanded his attendants to take the boy to his private room. The order was obeyed.

"What!" said Dushtabuddhi to himself, "this young stripling, whose ambition is a meal, to become the future king of Kerala! A rival to my son, Madana! No, it cannot

be. Not this alone,—he is to be united to me by bonds of love. Strange love indeed between two rivals! Further, he is to be my benefactor. I shall have no need of such helpers. The priests, clever as they are, often miscalculate. But it is better to be forearmed. Did not the priest say that fate was against the boy? He was correct so far. It was fate that brought him to my presence. Fate shall very soon remove him from this sinful world. A full purse never lacks men to do its bidding."

In a few minutes there was summoned to the minister's room a noted ruffian of the palace. Dushtabuddhi, calling him near, whispered to him, "I have never known you play me false. To-day I am entrusting to you a task which I cannot name even to my trusted counsellors. Carry the boy standing yonder to the thick of the forest and have him killed. Do it speedily and bring me proof that it is done. Take this bag of gold for your past services; it shall feed you and yours for a decade to come. Bear in mind that no man living must know aught of this Do my bidding, and acres shall be added unto you. Falter, and you know your fate."

The base slave bowed low, and with a

smile on his lips exclaimed, "Master, thy will shall be done."

With many winning words, the luckless boy was led out by the heartless murderer.

## CHAPTER VI

### A MIRACULOUS ESCAPE

IT did not take long for the ruffian to carry the innocent child to the forest surrounding the capital. He was so used to acts of murder that his conscience gave him no trouble. So practised was he in such deeds that he could hide his purpose till the very moment of its execution. He talked so pleasantly that he quickly won the heart of his victim.

The spot chosen for the foul deed well suited the purpose. It was in the innermost depths of the forest. So dense was the foliage that even the midday sun could not penetrate it. The place resounded with the wailing of the fox and the wolf and the ominous chirping of wild birds. The land abruptly descended at one end into a deep chasm whose bottom was invisible.

With many coaxing words, the boy was

gently laid upon the ground. He entwined his arms tightly round the ruffian's legs, as though he sought the latter's protection against the gloom of the place. Suddenly he saw a flash of light above him; quickly it descended upon him and just as it was about to touch him he saw it was the gleam of a sword. Swiftly moving aside he uttered the many names of Vishnu in a sweet, imploring voice. The murderer's uplifted sword dropped down and he stood before the child bewildered. The innocent lips uttering the divine names melted his heart of flint. Kneeling before the child, he said, "I am powerless against thee. Thou hast a charmed life. I dare not touch thee for all the treasure the world can lay at my feet."



Next minute, the minister's threat flashed across the ruffian's mind; but a moment's

thought showed him a way of escape. Approaching the child, he said "Stern were the orders issued to me to kill you before the evening sets in. My heart forbids it. But your enemy must not know but you are dead. I must take from you the additional toe that disfigures your lotus-like foot. This shall be for your good and mine." The child heard not the words. Only he felt an intense pain as the sharp edge of the sword severed the toe from his foot, and soon he was unconscious.

The ruffian hurried from the spot, and quickly returning to the minister laid the toe at his feet as a token of his faithful service. The minister was overjoyed, and the "faithful" slave was loaded with rich presents.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE END OF A STRANGE DAY

CHANDANAVATI was a small principality bordering on Kuntala's capital. Its rulers were ever loyal to their overlord. Its tribute was always the first to reach Kuntala's treasury, and none living remembered a time when its dues were in arrears.

It so chanced that the aged ruler of the land, Kulinda, went out a-hunting, on the very day of the events narrated in the last chapter, to the very same forest. Long did his loyal chieftains beat the thick forest for game, but no animal issued forth. At last, as evening set in and they were about to give up the chase and return homeward, a spotted deer was sighted at a distance, and it soon became the quarry of their pursuit. It led them to the very depth of the forest and at last was brought to bay.

As the prince was about to string the fatal shaft, a strange music filled his ear. The sacred names of Lord Vishnu proceeded from a copse on his right. Forcing his way through the thick foliage, he entered in.

A strange sight met his eyes. A child of hardly four summers was lying on the ground. His face shone with the gentle radiance of the full moon. His limbs were supple and of perfect form. Such coral red lips and such a bewitching, though half-closed, pair of eyes, Chandanavati's ruler had never seen before.

Verily, verily, he saw in the boy the hand of God. He had long prayed for a child to beautify and delight his home; many aus-

terities and charities he had performed. This, he thought, was God's answer.

Running to the child, he took him in his arms and gently raised him to his lips, when he beheld the blood upon his foot. A closer examination revealed that the child must have had an extra toe which had been cut off. The state surgeon was immediately sent for, and he rode to the spot post haste. The wound was dressed, and the child slowly recovered his senses.

The return of the ruler to his capital was a triumphal procession. News of the strange find had gone in advance, and the people of the city vied with one another in adorning their house-fronts and offering their welcome to the royal party. The elders of the town welcomed the king with band and music, and the ministers offered him their congratulations. Temple bells rang to the glory of the Lord On High. Women peeped from the balconies to catch a glimpse of the future ruler of the land and his thrice-blessed father. Flower garlands and fillets of gold covered the king's car. Festoons and arches greeted the king at every turn.

As the chariot entered the palace gate, the queen of Chandanavati came forth to

receive her lord and the new-found child. Her maids waved lights and saffron-water over his head to ward off the "evil-eye" of the seething crowd outside.

"My dear," said the king, addressing his queen, "I have brought you a priceless treasure. Remember you not that, when I set out to hunt, you ran up to me and wished me a happy chase? Remember you not my promise then to get you game worthy of our love? Our lips then spoke of the coming truth. Behold this Child! Take him in your arms and sing him your sweetest lullabies."

She required no request. Kissing the boy fervently on his forehead, she addressed him," Child, darling, beloved of Gods and men, what shall I call thee? Thy face is bright and beautiful as the full moon. Chandrahasa[1] shall be thy name.Chandrahasa, my beloved, open thy lips and speak. Thou hast brought us joy, and to thy father's kingdom hope."

The child understood not the import of the words. Nor did the shifting scenes of that memorable day enthuse his mind. He was dazed with wonder. He longed for the company of the children of Kuntala from

1. Chandra: moon. Hasa : face. (Chandrahasais a Sanskrit word.)

whom he had been so cruelly wrenched. His venerable Guru's face seemed to smile on him, when he slept that night; for was it not he who taught the child to seek the succour of Vishnu and pronounce His myriad names?

## CHAPTER VIII

### THIS PICTURE AND THAT

SIXTEEN years rolled on.

Dushtabuddhi continued to reign in Kuntala. Vishaya, Champaka and Madana became attached to one another by the bonds of friendship. The minister's heart was gladdened; one more step and, he was sure, his son would inherit the throne.

What of the kingdom? It was getting poorer and poorer. Wise statesmen were beginning to say, "Kuntala's star has set."

Some unjust and crafty ministers have nevertheless been patriotic and have enriched their countries, though by unworthy means. But Dushtabuddhi's case was different. Dushtabuddhi had no time to attend to the affairs of the state. Selfishness clouded his vision and got the better of patriotism. So as each year passed on,

less money poured into the royal treasury. The tributary chiefs imitated their master in their cruelty. They fawned upon him like pet dogs, but neglected their rightful duty.

Chandanavati, the only principality that stood really loyal to the suzerain in word and deed, fell on evil days. For some years, famine troubled the land. When the elements began to favour the country, tribesmen from neighbouring provinces, seeing the unsettled state of Kuntala, attacked the people suddenly and ran back to their safe homes with rich booty. Thus the land continued to be poor. When people had no food to eat, where could money be found to enrich the over-lord's treasury?

But this state of things was not destined to last long. The king's foundling of sixteen years back, had now arrived at man's estate. The best masters of Chand-navati had been his tutors. Learned he was, not only in the arts of peace but in those of war as well. He could shoot a fish's eye under water as cleverly as he could decide an intricate point of law. He could rouse his men to heroic action as easily as he could subdue erratic minds by

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discourses on the Puranas and the Ithihasas. He had the supreme virtue of winning over his opponents by sweet reasonableness. No man had ever approached him without returning happy and contented. No miscreant was brought before him but acknowledged his fault and became a faithful ally. Quick to perceive faults in others, he was equally quick to acknowledge his own faults when pointed out.

He saw the misery of the people and was moved to pity. With the permission of his father, he travelled about the land *incognito*, visiting remote and obscure places and observing the people's habits and wants.

Returning to the capital, he set about reforming the administration. More schools and colleges were opened. State lecturers were appointed to teach the country folk the laws of health and sanitation. More canals and wells were dug and the waste lands were cultivated. Roads were laid and trees planted on either side.

Then he turned his attention to the putting down of the frontier invaders. He formed a citizen army and at its head marched to the border lands and quelled the rebellious elements.

A happy and contented land is ever prosperous. There, wealth accumulates. So Chandanavati under Chandrahasa once more came into her own.

Nor did the young Prince forget his overlord. He ordered his minister to render Kuntala her full dues.

## CHAPTER IX

### AN UNEASY MIND

IT was a glorious day in the month of June when a richly dressed messenger arrived at the court of Kuntala and begged the favour of an audience with the minister. After much parley with the latter's private secretary, and a heavy bribe, he was shown in.

" Welcome, stranger. Thou hast a noble bearing. Bringest thou a message from one of my loyal chieftains?" spoke Dushtabuddhi.

" I do, noble lord. Chandanavati's ruler sends thee his greetings and those of his subjects."

" Oh! We are indeed honoured! Many lordly chieftains have visited us and paid us customary honours. But thy king is too

proud! Or is he weak with age? Let him, then, give way to a younger man. Heavy are thy master's dues to our treasury. My king has often bidden me take him prisoner."

"Merciful liege," broke in the stranger, "thy servant, the chief of Chandanavati has been ever loyal to thee. But famine and tribal warfare had so long impoverished his land. Only of late has the land grown rich, and our ruler has lost no time in sending through me the dues for the past seventeen years and the penalty fixed by law."

"Oh, strange indeed! So wonderful a change in so short a time! It verily passes my understanding, how Chandanavati could play so foul."

"Wonderful indeed it is, my lord. Had it not been for our master's son we should be continuing in our misery still."

"Another mare's egg! Thy master hath a son! A son born to him in his seventieth year! Away, thou fool! A ruler's time is too precious to be wasted on such absurd stories.'

"Pardon me, sir. He has a son, and more wonderful than a juggler's feat was his birth to my master. The child my

master found in a jungle when he went there a-hunting. Being childless, he brought him home and brought him up as his son. He rules not only the land but our hearts as well."

"Wonderful! Proceed with thy story."

"It was, my lord, seventeen years ago to the very day. I remember the scene to the veriest detail. We would have said that God, hearing our master's prayer, had left the child there; but his foot was maimed. A toe had been cut off. Perhaps it was a ruffian's homage to the child whom nature had disfigured with an additional toe."

Dushtabuddhi's face changed colour, but quickly suppressing his feelings he said:

"Right glad am I that days of prosperity are your lot. Bid thy slaves reveal their presents, and have the tribute conveyed to the treasury. Convey to thy master my congratulations, and offer him the greetings of his king. Tell him that I shall soon be in his land to glory with him in his foster-son's deeds of valour. Adieu."

The messenger departed, and Dushtabuddhi was left alone. The story of the strange find set him a-thinking. His mind grew uneasy. The date and the toe were

significant. The events of seventeen years back—the festive day, the strange prophecy and his cruel orders—flashed across his mind as happenings of yesterday.

He thought of the witness for the deed—a mere toe. Had he really been deceived? Or was it a chance coincidence? Was not the ruffian selected the surest hand in murder? Yet how could a murderer's word be believed? These thoughts troubled him. He spent a sleepless night.

At last he resolved to visit Chandanavati and see the boy with his own eyes.

## CHAPTER X

### THE DEPARTURE

CRAFTY men often succeed in their aims. Dushtabuddhi proceeded to the king's palace, conveyed to the king the joyous news of Chandanavati's prosperity, and sought his permission—he pretended to do nothing without the king's consent—to visit the feudatory land. Consent was readily given. Madana was ordered to act in his father's place. An auspicious day was selected for the journey, and splendid preparations were made.

On the morning of the day of his departure, the minister sent for his son and spoke to him thus:

"Child, to-day, with my departure, you enter upon a new phase of your life. May God help you to bear the heavy burden! Remember that firmness is the mark of a ruler of men. Forget not that sudden changes, though well meant, lead to revolution and anarchy. Continue to carry on my policy, and you will be honoured by the people."

"Father, I understand not your words. My guru told me—and so every one says—that you are on a short visit to Chandanavati and will be returning in a week at the latest. If this be true, what need is there for one to act in your stead? Cannot the second minister Dweshabuddhi attend to urgent matters of state? Certainly he would be far better than my inexperienced self."

"My dear boy, talk not so; a good assistant may not always prove an efficient master. Familiarity with comrades renders him unfit for wielding authority and enforcing obedience. Knowing this, our king, without even consulting me, has nominated you and this morning the

appointment has been proclaimed throughout the town."

"I obey the king's behest," replied Madana.

"One more word, my boy. I overheard the king this morning wailing his sonless state. He was discussing with the queen the marriage of fair Champaka to a worthy youth who might succeed him to the throne."

"Is it so, father? I am so glad at the news. Champaka is of age and should wed a noble youth. I suspect your visit to Chandanavati is for this purpose. Some young men were telling me just an hour ago that Chandrahasa, its prince, is a paragon of beauty and learning. If our fair Champaka is united to him, it will be the union of like with like."

"What you say is news to me. I go there on a more serious mission. I only want to convey to you that your name was mentioned by the queen, and the king saw no objection to it. Only he wanted his daughter's wishes to be consulted."

"What you say sounds strange, father. I love Champaka as a sister and she treats me as a brother. Matrimony between us! Impossible! A worthier lad, of princely

stock, must hold her hand and be her happy mate. I shall rejoice in my sister's happiness."

The minister replied : "What! You talk like a fool. 'Faint heart never won fair lady.' It is time for me to depart. Choose between a realm with a fair lady, and your present position with an insecure future and many rivals. Men need no teaching in the art of courtship. Heed a father's word. Else, I leave you to your fate. Each man must work out his own destiny. Ādieu."

Soon after this the minister departed.

## CHAPTER XI

### DUSHTABUDDHI AT CHANDANYVATI

DUSHTABUDDHI was welcomed at Chandanavati in a manner befitting his rank and dignity. Chandrahasa himself looked after the arrangements. When the minister entered the feudatory's capital, he was filled with wonder at the sight of the broad streets, spacious lawns and magnificent mansions which put to shame even his own city, the seat of an empire. Festoons and evergreens covered the entire route to

the City Hall. Galleries were set upon either side of the roads, and teemed with eager crowds who showered flowers and sprinkled rosewater on the royal visitor.

The reception at the City Hall was a stately and solemn ceremony. Kulinda's chief minister introduced the various officers to Dushtabuddhi, and presented him with an address of welcome in a casket of gold set with rubies and diamonds and mounted on an ornamental ivory stand of rare workmanship. He was decked with garlands of flowers, camphor and gold.

The route from the City Hall to the king's palace was lined with stalwart citizen soldiers, who presented arms. The king, waiting at the threshhold of the palace, eagerly welcomed the great visitor and led him to the Audience Hall. After mutual congratulations and other formalities, Chandrahasa was called in.

He entered, did obeisance to his father and "the Country's Patron," and stood with folded hands awaiting orders.

Kulinda, pointing to Chandrahasa, said, "This, sir, is my foster-son. He is God's gift to me and my people."

Dushtabuddhi eyed him closely. "I am mightily pleased, Kulinda. I have heard

of your strange fortune, and have been eagerly looking forward to the day when I could share your company and that of your queer son and enjoy your hospitality."

"Our kingdom is honoured by the visit of Your Excellency. The shades of evening are closing fast upon me. I feel my days are numbered. When I am gone, who shall guide and protect this youth—this gift of the gods—except your great self? I commend him to your care."

"A difficult charge indeed, to have under one's care a man of so much a wisdom and courage as has turned a desert into a land flowing with milk and honey! Rest assured he shall be no worse treated than my own son."

In this strain they talked for long.

Dushtabuddhi was convinced that Chandrahasa was the very boy whom he had ordered to be foully put to death. Resourceful as he was, he quickly thought of a plan to remove him from the face of the earth.

Two days after his arrival, Dushtabuddhi, sent for Chandrâhasa. After the customary greetings, the elder spoke :

"Chandrahasa, pardon me for a commission I am reluctantly forced to lay upon

you. In the hurry of my preparations, when I started out for this place, I forgot to leave a message of grave import with my son. This omission I noticed but yesterday night. It brooks no further delay. I fear to confide the message to less trusted hands."

"Deign to give it, Your Excellency, and it shall be carried."

"Nobly spoken. Here is a letter. Take the swiftest horse from your stables, ride to my capital and hand this to my son. To avoid delay and the public gaze, give up even the princely appendage of attendants."

"I obey," spoke the proud prince and reverentially put the letter into his pocket.

"Forget not, fair youth, it contains tidings which my son alone must know. Your fame is now on its trial. Return quickly with my son's answer."

## CHAPTER XII

### THE FAIR FORGER

QUICKLY mounting his favourite horse, Chandrahasa spurred it on towards Kuntala. He minded not the fierce rays of the sun or the dreary forest he had to tra-

verse. A sense of duty overpowered all physical discomfort.

At last, as he sighted the tall towers of Kuntala, a load of anxiety seemed to be lifted from his heart. On his right, he saw a beautiful grove; its shady trees and the sweet notes of the Kokil seemed to invite him there. His limbs and his foaming horse sorely needed rest. "Surely the minister's son will not grant an audience at such an hour. No harm in tarrying here a little. Poor animal, she needs rest." So saying he drew rein at last.

Alighting, he tied the horse to the trunk of a peepul tree. Wearied with the long journey, he laid himself down on the grassy meadow, and in a moment was asleep.

This garden belonged to Kuntala's king. It was reserved for the women of the royal household, and no man had ever before been in it. A beautiful pond lay in its centre for the royal ladies to sport in. Spotted deer roamed and gay peacocks danced in its extensive grounds. Nature and man seemed to have vied with each other in rendering it a fit resort for the most lovely of ladies.

To this self-same garden, Vishaya, Dushtabuddhi's daughter had repaired

that noon in the company of Champaka and some other maids. The girls, as is very common, had quarrelled among themselves. Vishaya taking to heart some remarks made about her by the rest withdrew from them in protest, and vowed childlike, never to seek their friendship any more.

In a fit of absent-mindedness, such as comes upon those who smart under others' insults, she walked along the path leading to the public highway. The snorting of a horse suddenly roused her attention. Looking up she saw a noble steed tied to a tree trunk. Instantly her eyes met Chandrahasa's fair form lying on the soft grass below. A glance was enough to reveal to her the beauty of his face. He seemed to smile in his sleep; so look they who hold converse with angels.

A strange feeling overcame her. An unutterable something drew her towards him. So, over the fair, soft grass she stepped forward. When she came near to the sleeper, a lovely shame filled her and she felt the spring of love gush up in her bosom. Yet she gazed. The more she gazed, the more she wondered whether he was a mortal or a god.

Suddenly her keen eye noticed a letter dangling from his pocket. Her first impulse was to go to the stranger, take out the letter and thus learn his name and rank. But shame held her, and fear arose with growing love. But, this too lasted only for a minute. Saying other-self, "Why should I fear?", she nimbly and softly went up to him and drew out the paper.



What was her surprise when she saw her own father's seal on the envelope! She hastily opened it and read its contents—once, twice, thrice. She staggered, and her eyes were dimmed with tears. She read once again. A sudden joy was revealed in her face.

"Surely my father never meant what he has written. 'The bearer is my dearest friend and the future Lord of Kuntala. That joyous we may live, give him at once good *vishama*,[1] my son. Delay not.'

"Give him at once good poison. Why should a dear—nay, the dearest—friend be given poison? Poison for a goodly youth, the Lord of Kuntala to be! No, no, it cannot be. My father is too busy a man to revise his own letters. It is an infirmity with great men. What irony! Certainly 'give vishaya' is what he meant. Let me undo my father's carelessness."

Quickly she smeared on the nail tip of her little finger some lamp-black from her eyelashes. Gently but with a steady hand she changed vishama into vishaya.[2] She read the letter over again, felt satisfied, fervently kissed her little finger, the instrument of good, replaced the letter in the envelope and in Chandrahasa's pocket, and ran back hastily.

Standing at a distance, she took a long farewell. She felt departing from him a pain. For she felt

1. Sanskrit. Poison.

2. This is easy. In sanskrit 'ma' is written, मा 'ya' is written या.

The secret sympathy,
The silver link, the silken tie
Which heart to heart, and mind to mind,
In body and in soul can bind! [1]

But it was getting late and the sleeper showed signs of awakening. She ran hastily back to her palace.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE WEDDING

THE rider woke up, ignorant of the sweet forgery, and remounting his horse hurried to Madana's mansion and handed him the letter. Madana, offering the visitor the customary welcome, seated him in the Audience Hall. Then he went to his private apartments and read the letter.

Its brevity surprised him not a little. Its contents were so unexpected that he read and re-read it a number of times. But the contents were plain; his father bade him celebrate the wedding of his sister with the fair stranger, and he was directed to lose no time in carrying out the command.

He hurried at once to the family priest,

1. Lay of the Last Minstrel.

Galava by name. Showing him his father's letter, he sought the guru's advice. The revered and aged preceptor said, " Your father's orders must be obeyed instantly. He must have a purpose in hastening the celebrations. He never acts without deep thought. This evening, so the stars proclaim, is highly auspicious. To-morrow is an ominous day. Let us not delay."

"Call your chamberlain and send urgent invitation to the nobles. Send word to the priests. Let state musicians go out and proclaim the wedding all through the city. Let a stately pandal be erected in the palace courtyard."

The arrangements were quickly made.

Chandrahasa could not believe the eyes or trust the ears which told him that he was to marry the minister's daughter. Vishaya too appeared to feel surprised when the news was broken to her by her maids.

The marriage ceremony was simple, though solemn. Madana gave away his sister to Chandrahasa, the Prince of Chandanavati. As the couple walked around the holy fire seven times, their grace and bright looks recalled to the minds of the poets and philosophers

assembled there, the Moon and Mars in conjunction traversing the cloudless sky. Chandrahasa vowed to be faithful to his bride and she vowed to be loyal and obedient to him " for all time to come."

Vishaya's mother felt proud at the beauty of the bridegroom. Madana, her brother, was struck with the prince's learning. None but the most learned in the Shastras could pronounce the sacred words so clearly or so well fit them with the corresponding sacramental acts. His was no lisping of words that bore no relation to the action done.

As they stood together to receive the blessings of the assemblage, no childish frivolity played on their faces. Well did they realise the solemn responsibilities into which they were entering.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE VILLAIN SURPRISED

DUSHTABUDDHI had no doubts about Chandrahasa's death by poison. To silence Kulinda was equally necessary. So, on the evening of the same day, he ordered his attendants to imprison the old king. Before they could carry out his orders, he

started off from Chandanavati. Baseness and ingratitude could go no further. On reaching Kuntala—it was in the early hours of the night—he was surprised to find his palace illuminated and music proceeding thence. He wondered what the cause of the revelry was. He spurred on his horse. On the way a group of Brahmins, decked with garlands and sandal paste and chewing betels, accosted him; they saluted him and prayed for him the birth of a beautiful grandson. This only served to increase his wonder.

At last he reached the palace gate. The festive evergreen arches formed of the boughs of areca and cocoanut palms with clustering fruits hanging down, and the designs of rice powder, white and coloured, in front, clearly pointed to a wedding celebration. Entering the canopied courtyard, his eyes fell on Chandrahasa and Vishaya sitting on a raised platform surrounded by friends of both sexes.

He was stunned and he cursed the whole world.

The bridal party saw Dushtabuddhi. Their joy knew no bounds. Immediately the couple rose from their seat and approched the master of the house. Galava thee

priest offered him saffron rice to bless them with. As they prostrated before him, his mouth uttered the customary blessing:

"May you, Chandrahasa, live for ever."

"May you, Vishaya, wear the saffron robe to the end of your life.'' But his heart cursed his son-in-law and his rising fortune.

His smiling face hid his foul heart. He enquired after each guest, as became the bride's father, joined in the festivities of the wedding, and retired to his bed very late.

Calling Madana to the bed-chamber, he queried, "What hast thou done my son? I marvel at thy stupidity."

"Pardon me, sire. The time before me was short, and I did the best in the circumstances. Your command was explicit. Our priest consulted the almanac and gave his sanction."

"Show me the letter I sent to you."

It was handed over, and Dushtabuddhi read it and scanned every line of it. His surprise was unparalleled. But he suspected no forgery. He said within himself, "Man proposes, but God disposes."

Addressing Madana, he spoke,—"In the heat of the moment I omitted to add that I was coming to-night. The fault was not

yours. These eyes were indeed blessed to see our Vishaya and her lord in their marriage robes."

## CHAPTER XV

### ESCAPE AGAIN

NEXT morning when Chandrahasa paid the customary respects to Dushtabuddhi, the latter embraced him and spoke:

"Fair son, I seek your pardon for hiding from you the happy plan. A pleasant surprise is always welcome. It must have been doubly so in your case, for Vishaya is no ordinary girl. It is no mere father's pride that makes me call her a precious gem.

"One more rite is still left to be done. Outside the city gate, towards the east, stands a lonely temple. The Goddess Kali[1] sanctifies it with Her presence. Round Her are hung the gifts which earnest devotees have offered Her, in fulfilment of their pious vows.

"Our family tradition demands, and our religion sanctifies it, that you should go to the temple in your wedding robes andoffer the divine Mother sacred offerings. Alone and unattended you shall visit Her fane,

1. A manifestation of Parvathi, Siva's Spouse.

for fearlessness marks Her devotee. As your lips utter the sacred prayers, no thoughts save those of Her glory and grace shall cloud your vision.

"Night is sacred to the great Destroyer's spouse. Her dance is set to the music of the stars. Go, therefore, to Her shrine after evening sets in, and pay her your devotion. Light the sacred camphor, and as its smoke rises up, let your spirit soar to Heaven.

"Madana, my son, shall hand you the plate of gold, sanctified by the sacred offerings of a good many generations of my ancient line. It shall bear your gifts of fruits, flowers and sandal paste too. For are you not my son?"

Chandrahasa bowed obedience.

"Heaven favours me," thought Dushtabuddhi as he sat, a few hours later, in secret conference with the boldest ruffians of the land. He charged them: "Spare him not. By stealth and cunning, he has usurped my daughter's love. Now he aims at royalty itself. Let the impudent youth be offered as a sacrifice before the great Destroyer's temple. Do not allow kinder feelings to overrule your loyalty to the hand that feeds you. Ape not nervous

women and hypocritical Sadhus. Strike, and strike home."

The agents of the devil vowed obedience.

The same evening, as dusk slowly crept over the busy city, Chandrahasa prepared himself for the night worship. He bathed in scented water as became a prince, and completed his evening ablutions. Entering his wife's apartment, he told her of Dushtabuddhi's command. "Pray for me too, and seek the Mother's blessings to guide our steps along the path of duty and service," lovingly spoke Vishaya. Her gentle hands placed offerings on the plate of gold.

Chandrahasa started out.

Prince as he was, he avoided the public gaze. Choosing a lonely path, he proceeded on his way. No sound save that of the ominous owl greeted him. The darkness of the night was appalling; only a stray glowworm here and there emitted its light. At last the glimmering light of the temple lamp greeted his eyes. Hope leapt up in his breast.

Suddenly he heard heavy footsteps behind him. He stopped short and turned quickly. Surprise of surprises! Madana

stood there, feverish haste marking every line in his face.

"What, Madana! Your father's orders were clear. I have to go alone to the Goddess. Why enrage Her with our double presence?"

"A matter of state has brought me here. The king of this land bade me to send you to the palace immediately. Tarry not here. The occasion brooks no delay."

"I am puzzled. The orders of the king must be obeyed. Yet your father's charge I cannot lightly set aside."



"Fear not, my brother. I shall offer to the Goddess your sacred gift. My family's custom permits it."

Saying this, Madana took the offerings in his hands and bidding a hasty farewell to Chandrahasa, proceeded towards the temple.

Chandrahasa turned back and hastened to the palace.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE PROPHECY FULFILLED

FOR the first time Chandrahasa saw the king of Kuntala. A nobler figure he had never seen. As the aged king sat on the deerskin-covered throne, the very picture of purity, he recalled to Chandrahasa's mind the divine kings of old. Holy ashes sanctified his eyebrows and tulsi beads shone round his head. An aged priest, a veritable Vasishta,stood before him.

"Welcome, child," spoke the ancient monarch. "I have heard of your prowess through our preceptor Galava. Kulinda's sacred find you are, and have gladdened his aged heart. Only yesterday did our wise minister entrust you with the sacred charge of his lovely child.

"The shades of evening are crowding upon me ; I feel my end near. Only this morning did I behold my shadow headless. A surer sign of one's impending end was never vouchsafed to man. God sends us such portents for our guidance. The

Shastras bid us spend the few days of the evening of life in meditation. True to the tradition of my race and high calling, I am to quit the world and seek the refuge of the forest. Delay is dangerous. Ere to-morrows's sun brightens the eastern horizon, I must be gone.

"But I owe a duty to my people. Kingless I dare not leave them. Anarchy will prevail in the land. Maheswara[1] has not blessed me with a son. My only daughter, Champaka, I offer you as your bride. Refuse her not. Rule this land wisely and well."

"Revered liege, forgive me. I am already Vishaya's—"

"Noble youth, fear not. Our laws permit it. Vishaya, who is even now in the inner apartments of the palace, has given her consent, nay welcomes Champaka as her partner. Champaka too feels proud that Vishaya shall share with her your love. Sisters they have been all these days, and sisters they shall be for ever."

"I obey the mandate of the king," replied Chandrahasa.

The wedding was a quiet ceremony. No drums beat and no trumpets shrilled as

1 Name for Siva (literally, the great Lord).

Chandrahasa tied the sacred *thali* round Champaka's neck. No eager crowd greeted the occasion. The king, the queen and the priest Galava alone witnessed the great sacrament. Galava, wise man that he was, kept the news of Dushtabuddhi's return from Kulinda's capital hidden from the king.

The ceremony over, Kuntala installed Chandrahasa on his royal throne, set on him the jewelled crown of the realm, and offering him loving blessings, departed to the forest in the early hours of the morning, followed by his faithful partner.

The prophecy was fulfilled.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE JUST PUNISHMENT

THE news of the king's departure and Chandrahasa's succession had spread like wild fire through the city even before the dawn of day. Courtiers crowded the ante-chambers of the palace, with presents of gold and silver for the new occupant of the throne. Under Galava's instructions, the late king's proclamation announcing

the events of the previous night was read at all street corners.

Dushtabuddhi alone was ignorant. Secure in the thought that his rival had been put to death, he lay late in his bed contemplating his own glory and the future of his son; but suddenly Chandrahasa burst into the room and prostrated himself before him. Dushtabuddhi, quickly rising, gazed in amazement upon the saffron-robed figure. "Thy grace has rendered me doubly fortunate. Vishaya acknowledges in Champaka a true partner in my love." These words of Chandrahasa as he rose up pierced the minister's heart like a poisoned arrow. He reeled and fell to the ground.

Chandrahasa was overcome with grief. Gently he raised him. Fresh water sprinkled on the forehead revived the unconscious figure. In a few minutes, Dushtabuddhi regained his consciousness, and looked intently at Chandrahasa. Anger clouded his face as he burst out, "Infidel! You dared to disobey the mandates of our Goddess. Terrible is her curse."

"Forgive me, my liege. I was on the threshold of the shrine when your son Madana ran up to me and begged me to hasten to the palace in obedience to the

king's orders. He pleaded family custom and carried the offerings himself to the Goddess."

"My Madana! Took the offerings! Oh, gods! Infidel, you have undone me."—So saying he stamped upon the floor, gnashed his teeth and beat his forehead.

His bloodshot eyes shone like burning coal. His face wore a weird look. Beating his breast, he strode out of the room, and like a maddened elephant rushed through the streets. He stopped not till he had crossed the threshold of Kali's temple.

Oh! What a ghastly sight greeted his eyes! Madana, the loveliest of his race and the child of his loins, lay dead in a pool of blood. The sacrificial plate lay dashed against the image of the Goddess.

He was stunned. He could not raise his voice in lamentation. His throat was choked with grief. In a fit of fury, like a tiger brought to bay, he dashed himself against a massive pillar and fell down dead.

# CHAPTER XVIII

## THE GREAT MIRACLE

WHEN Chandrahasa heard of the sad fate of Dushtabuddhi, he hurried to the temple with Galava. The sight sickened him. Father and son lay side by side like two stately trees struck down by lightning. Addressing the crowd that had gathered there, he poured forth his heart:

"Citizens, I stand before you a criminal. This—ah, sad fate! this gracious minister of your realm brought me to your hospitable city and showered upon me the holiest gift in his possession, the gift of his only daughter. He bade me worship the great Goddess, who, I see, frowns upon me. I proved unworthy of his confidence. In a fatal moment I entrusted the offering to the noble Madana—with what result these unhappy eyes behold.

"I stand before you all as the accursed sovereign of this unhappy land. Hardly has a day passed since this crown was placed on these brows, and behold your devoted minister lying dead of grief. Enough of my rule for you, goodly citizens of Kuntala. The sword I hold in my hand shall destroy me."

Then he turned to the Goddess.

"Mighty mother of the universe, forgive me my faults, strike me dead with the thunderbolt that Thy Lord doth wield. Accept this body of mine as a sacred offering, and in exchange vouchsafe these men, good and true, their lives. Why, in Thy anger against me, didst Thou strike down these two, the glory of the realm?

"An evil past shadows my whole life. I even now remember the ruffian's sword grazing my childish limbs, for what fault I could not divine. Happy had it been if kindness had not checked the murderer! But the mystic names of the Great Vishnu that I lisped in childish accent moved that murderer's heart to spare me! Art Thou not greater than Vishnu? Thou art the great primeval cause. Shall it be said that, where Vishnu's name could prevail, Thy presence has no power? I ask nothing for myself; descend from Thy throne and raise the dead."

He ceased. No answer came.

"Mother, Thou heedest not my prayer. In a moment, this, the gift of my good father Kulinda, shall sever me in twain. If I am a true devotee of Thee and Thy Lord and if I have in this birth spoken no

untruth and done no wrong, then raise them to life after I depart."

He paused. Then reverentially he unsheathed his sword, and raised it to his lips, and fervently kissed it, saying, "Good servant that you have been so long, serve me now well and truly, and you shall win your freedom."

Then he approached the Deity, placed the sword at Her feet, prostrated thrice before Her, and for a few minutes stood motionless in silent meditation.

Calm and resolved, he lifted up the sword...Slowly it came down...It was grazing his neck.

A sudden voice was heard from behind: "Stop! Stop! THE GODDESS HATH HEARD THEE." In blank wonder, Chandrahasa turned back and beheld his own dear Champaka.

"If thou art true to me in thought, word, and deed as thou didst promise last night, stay me not now. A wife must help, not hinder, her husband in acts of love and service."

"Fair lord, forbear to shed your blood. I bring you hope. The ceremony of last night kept me awake for long. Weighed down with exhaustion and sorrow at my

loving parents' departure, I fell asleep in the early hours of the morning. Long must I have slept, for when I woke from a strange dream, the sun was far up in the sky. In this dream, methought I saw an angel of God approaching me with a casket and bidding me offer it to thee. The angel spoke clear and said, "Awake. Bid thy lord break open this casket and pour the rich ointment it contains on whomsoever he desires to raise to life." I awoke and found this casket at the head of my bed. With it I ran about in search of you. But you were not to be found. I hurried at once to Vishaya's rooms. She told me of her sad fate, and has brought me hither. Here is the casket."

The casket was broken open. A crystal liquid lay in a goblet of gold. The goblet too was cut open. Chandrahasa taking it reverentially in his hand prayed to Kali once again.

Suddenly a voice was heard from Heaven, "Let none who has not saved his peer touch the sacred fluid."

Vishaya immediately came forward saying, "Sirs, I had once the honour of saving a precious life—when and how ye shall know later."

Chandrahasa handed the goblet to Vishaya, who poured the liquid down the throats of her father and brother, chanting hymns in praise of Durga.



Wonder of wonders! Father and son arose and gazed around them with vacant eyes. In a few minutes, they returned from the realm of the dead, understood what had happened and poured forth their gratitude to Chandrahasa and his brides.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE CHANT OF KARMA

DUSHTABUDDHI became a changed man. In the presence of the Goddess he reviewed aloud his whole career

and vowed to turn over a new leaf. His heart, now rendered pure by grief and penitence, learnt the great Truth about Karma:

"It knows not wrath or pardon; utter true
Its measures mete, its faultless balance weighs;
Times are as nought, to-morrow it will judge,
Or after many days.
By this the slayer's knife did stab himself;
The unjust judge hath lost his own defender;
The false tongue dooms its lie; the creeping thief
And spoiler rob, to render.
Such is the Law which moves to righteousness,
Which none at last can turn aside or stay:
The heart of it is Love, the end of it
Is Peace and Consummation sweet. Obey!"[1]

1. Edwin Arnold, 'The Light of Asia."

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